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ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY.

A paper was read by Jonathan Osborne, M.D., on Aristotle's History of Animals.

Dr. Osborne commenced by observing, that this work was composed under circumstances more favourable to the acquisition of natural knowledge than any work on the subject ever published. According to Pliny, some thousands of men were placed at the disposal of the author, throughout Greece and Asia,—comprising persons connected with hunting and fishing, or who had the care of cattle, fish ponds or apiaries,—in order that he might obtain information from all these quarters, *ne quid usquam gentium ignoraretur ab eo*: and according to Athenæus, the same prince gave him, on account of the expenses incurred in composing it, 800 talents,—a sum, which, taken at the lowest, that is, the lesser Attic talent, amounts to above 79,000*l*. The work, composed under such auspices, is such as might have been expected. The extent of the observations is prodigious; and we cannot read far in any part of it, without being constrained to exclaim with Cicero, *Quis omnium doctior, quis acutior, quis in rebus vel inveniendis vel judicandis acrior Aristotele?*

Shortly after the introduction of Greek literature to Europe, and when this book was first printed, those sciences which have nature for their object were in the lowest condition. There was at that time no taste diffused for the study of zoology or comparative anatomy; and at later periods, when the value of these studies came to be better appreciated, the Aristotelian philosophy had fallen into

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disuse. Thus this work has, from this combination of circumstances, been passed over; is seldom quoted except at second-hand; and no edition of it distinct from the other works of the author, or illustrated as the subject required, has appeared since that of Scaliger, published in 1619,—except one, accompanied by a French translation by Camus, in 1782, which is said to be incorrect, and is become scarce.

Dr. Osborne proceeded to make a short analysis of the contents of this work, and showed that Aristotle had anticipated Dr. Jenner's researches respecting the cuckoo, as also some discoveries with respect to the incubated egg, which have been published within the last year. His observations on fish and cetaceous animals are curious in the extreme, as might be expected from the variety of these animals abounding in the Grecian seas. Those on insects it is difficult to appreciate, from uncertainty as to the names. He describes the economy of bees, as we have it at present; but mistakes the sex of the queen. He holds the doctrine of spontaneous generation in those cases in which he could not detect the ovary; an inevitable conclusion arising from the want of the microscope, to which, and the want of knowledge of pneumatic chemistry, his principal errors are to be referred. The various organs are described as modified throughout the different classes of animals (beginning with man, the Βουλευτικον μονον), in nearly the same order as that afterwards adopted by Cuvier.

As specimens of the interesting matter treated of in the work, Dr. Osborne selected the animal nature of sponges; the ages of various animals; the movements of the nautilus; (the same doubt existing in the author's mind as to the origin of the shell, which has divided the opinions of Messrs. Blainville, Owen, Gray, and Mad. Power, within the last year;) the localities of animals, as affording data for ascertaining the rate at which they have extended themselves over the globe; particulars relating to artificial incubation as practised in Egypt; the management of cattle; a mode of fattening hogs with rapidity, by commencing with a fast of three days; the mohair goat located in Cilicia, as at present; hybernation and migrations of various animals and fish; description of the fisher-fish (*Lophius piscatorius*) and of the torpedo, with the proof that they catch their prey in the extraordinary manner described; many ingenious modes of taking the partridge, and of fishing detailed; the friendships which have been perpetuated between different classes of animals,—as the trochilus and the crocodile, the *Pinna muricata* and the *Cancer pinnotheres*, the crow and the heron; their animosities,

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These detached specimens of the contents of this work furnish, however, a very inadequate idea of its real value. There are in it whole sections, the separate sentences of which would furnish texts for as many Bridgewater Treatises. The freshness and originality of the observations, taken from nature herself, and not made up from quotations of preceding writers; the extent of the views, not bounded by any necessity for complying with preconceived or prevalent notions, but capacious as the author's mind itself, and frequently leading the reader into the most interesting under-currents of thought branching off from the great fountain; these are all merits belonging to the work, but not constituting its chief value,—which is, that it is a collection of facts, observed under peculiar advantages, such as have never since occurred, and *that it is at the present day to be consulted for new discoveries.*

Now that Greece is, for the first time since the revival of letters, in possession of a government capable of appreciating scientific investigations, a favourable opportunity offers for preparing an edition of the work, at once worthy of the age in which it was composed, and of that in which we live; and perhaps some individual may be found, possessing a competent knowledge of the Greek language, and of zoology and comparative anatomy, who, after a sufficient examination of the animals now in Greece, shall undertake the task of editing and illustrating this great work. Such a performance, properly executed, would be the resuscitation of a body of knowledge which has lain buried for above 2000 years; and would certainly be no less acceptable to zoologists and anatomists than to the cultivators of classical learning.

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We are glad to see, by the Second Report, which has just reached us, that this Society is proceeding vigorously and successfully in the promotion of those objects for which it was instituted (see page 137 of our present volume), and that several of the more influential gentlemen who are connected with those northern regions have given it their support. We feel confident that it cannot but succeed in

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